

DE MEUNG AND VILLON: RELIGION, FEMINISM  
AND RENAISSANCE TRENDS

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## PREFACE

The purpose of this study is to show similarities or parallelisms between Jean de Meung's Le Roman de la Rose and the poems of Francois Villon. In so doing, the reader will be able to discern trends of medieval life. The study is divided into an introduction and four chapters. The introduction gives the background of the works and pertinent information on the authors' lives. The first chapter consists of parallelisms in their treatment of religion. The second chapter shows similarities in the authors' treatment of love and women, while chapter three shows Renaissance trends prevalent in both the authors' works. The last chapter consists of a summary and the writer's conclusion.

The writer would like to extend expressions of gratitude to Dr. Earle D. Clowney, her advisor, whose assistance, guidance and encouragement helped to make such a study possible. Special thanks go to Mrs. Adelyne M. Conley for the typing of this study. Lastly, to her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Raymond R. Ross, Sr., she would like to extend words of love, devotion and appreciation for their inspiration and sacrifices during her stay at Atlanta University.

DE MEUNG AND VILLON: RELIGION, FEMINISM  
AND RENAISSANCE TRENDS

Introduction

There can be no denial that two of the most famous writings of the medieval period are Le Roman de la Rose by Jean de Meung and the poems of François Villon. Le Roman de la Rose, an allegorical poem composed of some twenty-two thousand eight-syllable verses, consists of two parts. The first part, by Guillaume de Lorris, contains four thousand fifty-eight verses written between the years 1225 and 1240; Jean de Meung, author of the second part, wrote approximately eighteen thousand verses about fifty years after the death of Lorris. Although the plot is continuous throughout, the parts are so different in concept and execution that they are often considered as two different works. For this reason, the writer has chosen only one of these works for study. Nevertheless, before any study of the works of de Meung or Villon can be made, one must become familiar with their background. Thus, this introduction will focus on acquainting the reader with the said background.

In order that one may fully understand Le Roman de la Rose it is necessary that he know something about the first part. Guillaume de Lorris begins his poem by stating that in the springtime he has a dream, which has since come true. At the command of the God of Love he has put it into verse for the delight of his readers and in honor of his love, the Rose. Then, he relates his dream: In May, Guillaume was strolling toward the bank of a river when, after lingering there,

he saw, surrounding a garden, a wall which was curiously designed, for decorating it were ten wonderful paintings. The figures were Hatred and her companions, Felony and Villainy; surrounding them were Covetousness, Avarice, Envy and Sorrow. On the other side stood Old Age, Hypocrisy and Poverty. Knocking at the gate of this wall, Guillaume is admitted to the garden by a young lady called Idleness. Following her, he travels over scented paths and reaches a lawn where Mirth is dancing with Delight, the owner of the garden. He joins in the dance with Courtesy, Joy, Delight; the God of Love with Beauty; Sweet Regard, Richesse, Largesse, Franchise, Idleness and Youth.

Leaving the dance, Lorriss takes the opportunity to describe the beautiful scenery found there. As he continues his route, he arrives at the fountain of youth, where an inscription states that Narcissus died in the waters of the fountain.

Au fond des eaux, il découvre deux blocs de cristal,  
où se reflète le jardin tout entier: C'est le miroir  
périlleux celui qui perdit Narcisse, et qui a pour vertu  
de faire aimer ce qu'on y aperçoit.<sup>1</sup>

Among a multitude of lovely objects some rosebushes are reflected in the miroir. He is enchanted by one of the roses, and were it not for the thorns, he would have picked it. In the meantime, the God of Love, who has been following him, approaches and, after having seen the Lover spellbound over the Rose, pierces him in the heart with five arrows: Beauty, Simplicity, Courtesy, Companionship and Good Seeming, all of which, reinforce the Lover's desire for the Rose and mix in his wound

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Bédier and Paul Hazard, Littérature française, Tome Premier (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1948), p. 92.

sweetness and sorrow.

From this point, Guillaume, the conquered Lover, finds himself at the will and mercy of the God of Love, who has locked the Lover's heart. The God of Love instructs him in the rules of love, its trials and tribulations, and the support to be derived from Hope, Sweet Thoughts, Sweet Speaking and Sweet Looks.

The God of Love soon disappears, leaving his servant torn with conflicting emotions but desirous above all things of possessing the Rose, on which he has set his heart. While debating with himself whether he should attempt to pick the Rose again, a gentle youth, Fair-Welcome, approaches and offers to help the Lover by inviting him to approach the Rose. However, when the Lover decides to pick the Rose, Fair-Welcome, surprised by his temerity, cries out. Danger who protects the Rose, forces the Lover to retreat. Later the Lover is approached by Reason who tells him to flee the God of Love. He does not listen to her but seeks the consolation of Friendship, who teaches him how to appease Danger. The result is that he is again allowed to see the Rose, and encouraged by the intercession of Venus, Welcome grants him permission to kiss it. Unfortunately, Slander sees the kiss, and tells Jealousy who then chides Shame for her indifference. As a precaution, Jealousy builds a wall around the Rose and locks up Welcome in a Tower, guarded by an old woman. Here ends the work of Guillaume, which is characterized by its vivid personifications; "they act within their roles; there are no tiresome digressions, no scholastic *jeux de mots*."<sup>1</sup> Great emphasis is placed upon courtly love and woman is highly

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<sup>1</sup>William Nitze and E. Preston Dargan, A History of French Literature (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), p. 59.

praised.

The continuation was written by Jean de Meung also called Jean de Chopinel or Jean Clopinel. He was born in Meung-sur-Loire in 1250 and died in 1305. It is believed that he studied at the University of Paris and spent most of his life in Paris. In addition, to his contribution to Le Roman de la Rose, he translated the Epitoma rei Militaris of Vegetius, "a fourth-century Latin writer from whom medieval strategists learned how to besiege a castle,"<sup>1</sup> The Life and Letters of Heloise and Abelard, and Boethius' sixth-century Consolation of Philosophy--among other works. His satiric and didactic Testament of Jean de Meung, like the Roman, satirizes the Mendicants.

With the continuation by de Meung, one can perceive a general change of philosophy. The change is from a poetic to a philosophical and satirical attitude. De Meung takes the opportunity to satirize different aspects of thirteenth-century society, as he often digresses from the narrative. The general mood is continued as the Lover moans his unhappy state. He regrets what has happened to Fair-Welcome. Reason approaches him and instructs him about the nature of love, affirming it to be but a mass of contradictions. Having listened to her discourse, the Lover vows that it is of little purpose. Reason then tells of the different kinds of love and friendship that exist in the world and condemns avarice, as well as the gifts and favors of Fortune. Above all else, however, she maintains that one must love

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<sup>1</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung, The Romance of the Rose, trans. by Harry Robbins (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1962), p. 182.

his neighbor. If there were true love among men, says Reason, there would be no need for kings or judges. She continues her long discourse, only to have the Lover once more declare himself the servant of the God of Love.

The Lover seeks the advice of Friendship, who instructs him in the Ovidian method of treating women. Then he listens to the advice of Riches. De Meung returns once more to the heart of the narrative by having the God of Love gather his troops, who prepare to seize the tower. Fearing a defeat, he sends a messenger to Venus and wins her promise to banish Chastity from all women. Following this episode, a discourse is given between Nature and Genius. Nature tries to destroy death, who strives to subdue the race which Nature has produced. She realizes that of all her creatures, Man alone does not observe her laws. Genius joins the army of the God of Love and the tower is finally taken; the Lover, now set free, picks the Rose. Such is the core of Jean de Meung's work.

The other important figure of this study is François Villon. François Montcorbier was born in Paris in 1431, the same year that Jeanne d'Arc was burned at the stake in Rouen. Although his family was poor, François had a well-to-do relative, Guillaume de Villon, from whom François received assistance and finally took his name. Later, he received a Bachelor's and Master's degree from the University of Paris. Little is known of his actual life, except those points that may be derived from his works. In 1455, he was involved in a situation which led him to murder a parish priest, Philippe Chermoye. He is also believed to have been among the ruffians who broke into the



Collège de Navarre. About this time (1456), he wrote Les Lais (or Le Petit Testament). Years passed and in 1461, he was arrested at Meun-sur-Loire. Pardoned by an amnesty given by Louis XI, Villon returned to Paris and wrote Le (Grand) Testament. In 1462, he was jailed again, in Châtelet, this time, and later he returned--sentenced to be hanged. Approaching death, he wrote La Ballade des Pendus, which has become one of his most famous ballads. A relenting Parliament changed the sentence to one of banishment from Paris for ten years. Free again he wrote the Panegyric to the Court of Parliament. After he left Paris, little is known about his actions or whereabouts. It is supposed that he might have been in poor health and died shortly thereafter.

Villon's poetry is written in a personal tone. Each of his poems deals with some acquaintance or facet of his life. Although some portions of his poems are believed to be figments of his imagination, people like Mademoiselle de Bruyères (a woman he addresses in Les Contrediz de Franc Gontier) and Robert d'Estouteville (for whom Villon wrote a ballad titled Ballade pour Robert d'Estouteville) actually existed. A man who once considered going into the monastery, he knew the Orders well; and in this light, criminal that he was, he knew Paris at its worst. Consequently, into his poetry he pours all this knowledge, giving it shape and substance with his genius.

His poems have been grouped into four classes: Les Lais (a series of legacies to his friends and enemies), Le Testament (a collection of ballads and rondeaux), Les Poésies Diverses (poems written during his "années errantes"), and Le Jargon et Jobelin (seven ballads in "jargon" where he boasts of the exploits of the Coquillards). For this study,

the majority of the examples will be taken from Les Lais and Le Testament, his chef-d'oeuvre.

The subjects treated by de Meung and Villon are numerous. If one considers those of de Meung, one can easily conclude that de Meung offers an encyclopedia of views on every possible subject, supported by great learning and revealing a master mind. In a similar vein, Villon, presents his views on the subject he knows best--the people and the places of Paris. Examining their ideas on various topics would be a rather tedious itinerary. For this reason, the writer has chosen to treat three themes found in their works. Since both authors have cunningly presented their comments on religion and feminism, the writer shall treat these themes in chapters one and two respectively. The third chapter will contain trends which show de Meung as a forerunner of the Renaissance and Villon as a transitional figure. These similar subjects have been treated by two men living two centuries apart--two of the most influential men of the medieval period: Jean de Meung and François Villon.

## CHAPTER I

### THE TREATMENT OF RELIGION

Among the many subjects that Jean de Meung and François Villon discuss, one of the most eminent is their treatment of religion. After reading the works of both authors, one can easily notice their sarcasm applied to the members of the religious orders. However, it is interesting to note their attitudes toward the dogma. If one focuses his attention first on the work of Jean de Meung, he finds that de Meung does not hide his feelings about religion. One such case occurs when the Friend holds a discourse with the Lover. The former tells the Lover about the Jealous Husband recalling the war between Beauty and Chastity. The Jealous Husband discloses that Beauty and Ugliness are in constant battle against Chastity. De Meung uses the Jealous Husband to show that, in spite of his subtle accusation that throughout the abbeys and the nunneries they have sworn against her (Chastity), the Jealous Husband swears to God, who is King of heaven that women who paint themselves in order to appear more beautiful are making war on Chastity. They are like crazy fools for not being content with that degree of beauty that God bestowed.<sup>1</sup> One cannot mistake his acknowledgement of God. At the same time, however, one must not mistake this God for the personified and limited God of Love mentioned in the

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<sup>1</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung, The Romance of the Rose, trans. by Harry Robbins (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1962), p. 182.

narrative, for de Meung clearly recognizes Him as the Omnipotent "God, who is of Heaven King."<sup>1</sup> De Meung projects his feelings farther when the Jealous Husband proclaims:

God helping me,  
I can protect myself from wind and storm.  
My woolen, lined with lambskin, is as good  
As any finer fabric furred with squirrel skin.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, not only does one realize that de Meung acknowledges God but also that he has faith in Him. He continues to express this belief in the words of Genius when Genius begins his exhortation to fecundity. In the monologue, Genius advises:

Strive, then, to lead the good life, one and all;  
.....  
And pray to God in Heaven, whom Nature owns  
As her great Master, that He will, in the end,  
Come to your aid when Atropos shall seek  
To bury you in Hell.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, one can safely conclude that de Meung is a man who expresses deep religious convictions. Though he satirizes the religious orders of his times, one can discern that it is not done in an attempt to be irreverent or sacrilegious but as an attack against the evils of the period in which he lived.

Turning now to Francois Villon, a man who also criticizes the monastic orders of his times, one can detect that he, like de Meung, expresses religious convictions. Interwoven with the witticism

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<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>3</sup>  
Ibid., p. 422.

expressed in the discussion of Thibaud d'Auxibigny, a bishop, the reverent appeal of Villon begins to unfold:

Si prie au benoist fils de Dieu  
 Qu'a tous mes besoins je reclame,  
 Que ma povre priere ait lieu  
 Vers luy, de qui tiens corps et ame,  
 Qui m'a preserve de maint blasme  
 Et franchy de ville puissance.<sup>1</sup> (Le Testament)

Realizing that prayer is of little value without repentance and faith, Villon acknowledges that he has sinned but he can still be saved. Therefore, one views Villon now not as a thief or as a murderer, but as a sinner confessing before God.

Je suis pecheur, je le scay bien;  
 .....  
 Combien qu'en pechie soye mort,  
 Dieu vit, et sa misericorde,  
 Se conscience me remort,  
 Par sa grace pardon m'accorde.<sup>2</sup> (Le Testament)

Perhaps the most touching example of his feelings can be found in his "Ballade Pour Prier Nostre Dame," taken from Le Testament.

Les biens de vous, ma Dame et ma Maistresse,  
 Sont trop plus grans que ne suis pecheresse,  
 Sans lesquelz biens ame ne peut merir  
 N'avoir les cieulx. Je n'en suis jangleresse:  
 En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir.

A vostre Filz dictes que je suis sienne  
 De luy soyent mes pechiez absolus....<sup>3</sup>

These are the words of a man who feels that he is going to be hanged.

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<sup>1</sup> The Complete Works of Francois Villon, trans. by Anthony Bonner (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1960), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

His words are sincere as he acknowledges his "foy" in the Superior Being.

On est frappé par le ton d'absolue sincérité qu'emploie ce mauvais sujet chaque fois qu'il est question de Dieu le Père, de Jésus-Christ, de la Saint Vierge, de sa foi Chrétienne. Par cette foi, comme par nombre de ses autres attitudes intellectuelles, Villon représente son milieu et son siècle.<sup>1</sup>

Having established that both de Meung and Villon held religious convictions, one better understands their satire of the religious orders of their times. Their satire, though their personal views, is objective in that the two men do not emphasize the dogmas themselves, but the persons who were corrupt and those who used the dogmas to their own advantage. De Meung makes this fact known in the words of False Seeming who admits while recounting his deceits to the God of Love that:

Religious folk more covert are than lay.  
I'll not defame religion or those blame  
Who in whatever habit follow it  
In humble loyalty, though ne'ertheless  
E'en these I will confess I cannot love.  
"I speak of false, felonious priests and nuns-  
Malicious ones who would the habit follow it  
But never would subdue their evil hearts."<sup>2</sup>

Establishing this idea, one has a better view of the evils of de Meung's day. Reason speaks against preachers who preach for wealth:  
"As bad divines are who overrun the earth, preaching to gain favor,

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<sup>1</sup> François Villon, Le Testament et Poésies Diverses, préparés par Barbara N. Sargent (New York: Meredith Publishing Company, 1967), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> De Lorris and de Meung, op. cit., p. 222.

honor, wealth."<sup>1</sup> There are still other forms of corruption found in the Order as described by Friend who expounds the pains of Poverty. He speaks of the "Mendicants"--friars who consisted of four orders: the Dominicans (in France, Jacobins or Frères Prêcheurs), the Franciscans (Cordeliers of Frères Mineurs), the Carmelites (Carmes) and the Augustinians. Friend tells of how the Mendicants intrude wherever they please but conceal their true nature in order to deceive the ones who give.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the two personages who thoroughly carry de Meung's message against the felonious religious orders are False Seeming and his friend False Abstinence. De Meung has emphasized his criticism against these two by ascribing to them a profession--Mendicants. One is able to see their character and understand de Meung's attitude, for even the God of Love is terrified when he first sees them. False Seeming, who represents the deceiver in love, is the son of Fraud and Hypocrisy, the father-to-be of Antichrist. Forced Abstinence, who might have been represented no more than continence in love, is the mother-to-be of Antichrist. When they set out as members of the God of Love's troop to conquer the tower, they are dressed as a Preaching Friar and a Béguine.

It is interesting to note how de Meung has subtly presented his satire by allowing False Seeming to boast of his deceits. His companion, "Forced Abstinence completes the satire, in that the term

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

abstinence means the sexual continence vowed by members of a religious order. To be a true virtue, however, such continence should be voluntary and not constrained."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, de Meung depicts the preachers who preach for wealth, favor and honor and others who deceive the people whom they are pretending to help (Mendicants). Moreover, he exposes the not-so-virtuous life of the cloister.

Villon, in a similar fashion, clearly portrays this absence of virtue in Lay (Rondeau):

Item, aux Freresmendians,  
Aux Devotes et aux Beguines,  
Tant de Paris que d'Orleans,  
Tant Turlupins que Turlupines,  
De grasses soupes jacoppines  
Et flans leur fais oblacion;  
Et puis apres, soubz ces courtines  
Parler de contemplacion.<sup>2</sup>

Here he addresses the Mendicants, les Filles-Dieu or Dévotes and Béguines--nuns whose vows were not perpetual--and the male and female Turlupins, a sect of heretics. All these, he suggests by reference to their conversation behind bed-curtains, add to the belief held by de Meung that many in the Order were immoral. Perhaps the most direct attack against the religious orders is taken from Les Lais, wherein Villon states: "Carmes chevauchent noz voisines."<sup>3</sup> He goes a step farther in showing how clever they are in defending themselves. Not

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<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid., p. xxiv.

<sup>2</sup>  
The Complete Works of François Villon, p. 82.

<sup>3</sup>  
Ibid., p. 15.



only are they masters in deceiving others but also in concealing their guilt.

L'homme bien fol est d'en mesdire,  
 Car, soit a part ou en preschier  
 Ou ailleurs, il ne fault pas dire<sup>1</sup>  
 Ses gens sont pour eux revenchier.<sup>1</sup>

He, like de Meung, tells how the Jacobins, Carthusians and the Celestines manage to eat well while the poor go hungry. There is no question about the evils and corruption found in the cloister. De Meung and Villon have no qualms about it. Instead, their poetry shows that this aspect of medieval life had not changed in the two hundred years that separated them.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

## CHAPTER II

### FEMINISM OR THE TREATMENT OF WOMEN

Having discussed de Meung's and Villon's treatment of religion, one realizes that he cannot touch the heart of their subjects unless he mentions their depiction of women. Feminism cannot be overlooked in discussing the two authors because it plays such a dominant role--especially in de Meung's work.

In the introduction to this study the writer states that Lorris, author of the first part of Le Roman de la Rose speaks highly of the fair sex. A half century later, de Meung, in continuing the work, has an entirely different view. Treating feminism in this chapter, the writer has found it convenient to discuss, first of all, the two authors' conception of love. If one considers de Meung's views on love initially, he may observe that de Meung does not hold love in esteem. De Meung wastes no time in expressing his ideas, for at the beginning of his work, when Reason remonstrates with Lover, he expounds his ideas. Reason begins by telling the Lover that he is a fool to let himself be trapped into falling in love. At the same time she denounces the God of Love who is the cause of the Lover's misery. She suggests to him that the only way he can free himself from bondage to the God of Love is to flee him.

Thus, one can surmise that she advocates fleeing the confinements of Love, especially if it causes suffering. Total revelation of the author's conception of love occurs when Reason defines love for the

Lover. In her definition, Reason makes quite clear the paradoxes in her definition: "Love is a troubled peace, an amorous war."<sup>1</sup> This is the first paradox that she states. Examining closely this simple phrase, one detects several things. First of all, to understand it, one may view Love as a two-sided coin. It is possible to flip it on either side, but there is no midpoint between them. On one side there is peace, contentment, joy. But this peace is not everlasting; it is not pacifying. No, it is a troubled peace. It is a contentment harassed by mental or spiritual agitation; one worries; he is disturbed.

A flip of the coin and love is shown to be an amorous war. Granted that love or affection is present--just as much as peace is present on the other side of the coin. However, in the same manner as the conflicts with the troubled peace, one finds that the affection stated here describes "war:" a struggle; a conflict between opposing forces. Thus, love is defined as a constant state of uneasiness. There is peace but there is war; there is love but also trouble. The author continues Reason's definition with a list of similar meanings:

A treasonous loyalty, disloyal faith--  
 A fear that's full of hope, a desperate trust--  
 A madman's logic, reasoned foolishness--  
 A pleasant peril in which one may drown--  
 A heavy burden that is light to bear--  
 Charybdis gracious, threatening overthrow--  
 A healthy sickness and most languorous health--  
 A famine swallowed up in gluttony--  
 A miserly sufficiency of gold--  
 A drunken thirst, a thirsty drunkenness--

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<sup>1</sup>  
 Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung, The Romance of the Rose, trans., by Harry Robbins (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1962), p. 96.

A sadness gay, a frolicsomesness sad-  
 Contentment that is full of vain complaints-  
 A soft malignity, softness malign-  
 A bitter sweetness, a sweet-tasting gall-  
 A sinful pardon, and a pardoned sin-  
 A joyful pain-a pious felony-  
 A game of hazard, ne'er dependable-  
 A state at once too movable, too firm-  
 An infirm strength, a mighty feebleness  
 Which in its struggles moves the very world-  
 A foolish wisdom, a wise foolishness;  
 It is prosperity both glum and gay-  
 A laughter full of sighs and full of tears-  
 Laborious repose by day and night-  
 A happy Hell, a saddened Paradise-  
 A prison which delights its prisoners-  
 A springtime mantled yet with winter's snow-  
 A moth that feeds on frieze as well as silk,  
 For love lives just as well in coarsest clothes  
 As in a diaper material.<sup>1</sup>

Seemingly, by the mere use of paradoxes to define love, the author wishes to show love as being contradictory and deceptive. As advised by Reason, one should flee it.

Villon takes the opportunity to express his ideas on love. In his Ballade et Oroison, wherein he prays for the soul of the late Master Jean Cotart, a man who defended him in court, he acknowledges love:

Pere Noe, qui plantastes la vigne,  
 Vous aussi, Loth, qui beutes ou rochier,  
 Par tel party qu'amours, qui gens engigne  
 De voz filles si vous feist approuchier.<sup>2</sup>

Love, according to Villon makes fools of men. However, this example shows that Lot was under the influence of drink, and perhaps it is not

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 95-96.

<sup>2</sup> The Complete Works of François Villon, trans. by Anthony Bonner (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1960), p. 86.

too substantial. Therefore, Villon uses other examples such as those found in Double Ballade of Le Testament. In this ballad, Villon says, ironically, that one should love as much as he can. As a result, however, "the only thing you will break will be your head."<sup>1</sup> Even wise Solomon and strong Samson were destroyed by it. He concludes that a man is lucky if he is without love.

Follis amours font le gens bestes  
 Salmon en ydolatria,  
 Samson en perdit ses lunettes.<sup>2</sup>

As if these Biblical characters were not enough to fortify his ideas, Villon continues by including such mythological figures as Orpheus, the gentle minstrel, who while playing flutes and bagpipes under the power of love, found himself at the mercy of a four-headed dog, and Narcissus, who drowned himself for love (of himself). Even the righteous David was tempted by his lust for a woman when he saw her bathing. Love, he continues, beckoned King Herod to cut off the head of Saint John the Baptist for dances and joys.<sup>3</sup>

In order to show that he is qualified to make such statements on the subject, Villon uses himself as an example of a victim of love. For a long time he had courted Katherine de Vausselles, but their relationship ended in her making fun of him and having him beaten. Here he makes reference to the occasion.

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<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>3</sup>  
Ibid., p. 57.

De moy, povre, je vueil parler:  
 J'en fus batu comme a ru telles,  
 Tout nu, ja ne le quier celer.  
 Qui me feist maschier ces groselles,  
 Fors Katherine de Vausselles?<sup>1</sup>

In still another attempt to explain his position he states that he renounces all loves and defies them. If someone asks him how he can speak so ill of love, he answers that it is because: "Qui meurt, a ses loix de tout dire."<sup>2</sup>

De Meung, in the voice of Reason, presents still another idea on love. Not only does love make one foolish, but it also robs one of precious moments of his youth. Persons who are drunk with love, he says, feel great mischief. After one has wasted his time in this "sport" he will soon recognize it for its value, but the time lost can never be regained.

Although de Meung speaks so strongly against love, he digresses a moment, in saying that "true love" should have its birth from noble heart, not of the carnal delight that seems to master men. Carnal delight impersonates love.<sup>3</sup> However, this thought seems somewhat idealistic and momentary, for de Meung voices strongly a different purpose for the intangible object. Even Villon seems somewhat mystified when in the Ballade pour Robert d'Estouteville he expresses fidelity to a woman:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> De Lorris and de Meung, op. cit., p. 101.

Dame serez de mon cuer sans debat,  
Entierement jusques mort ne consume.<sup>1</sup>

However, any link of this sentiment with the feelings of Villon is broken when one realizes that this ballad was written for Robert d'Estouteville to his wife. Villon acknowledges that such tenderness and fidelity can be felt--but by others, not himself. "De sa propre expérience de l'amour Villon n'a que cynisme et amertume."<sup>2</sup>

In spite of his sharp criticism of love, de Meung believes that love has a special purpose. This view is also held by Villon. De Meung states that the purpose of love is the continuation of the race. In the words of Reason he describes love as being between two persons of opposite sex, and as a purely physical attraction. Reason continues by saying:

...I know  
That every man who with a women lies  
Should wish, as best he may, to procreate  
The tenement for an immortal soul,  
So that the race's succession may not fail  
When he shall go his way to dusty death;  
For when the parents die 'tis Nature's wish  
That they leave children to perpetuate  
Their likeness, and refill the void they've left.<sup>3</sup>

Later, de Meung offers the following comment:

If natural love you wish one to define,  
I'll say perpetuation of a race  
By generation and by nourishment

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<sup>1</sup> The Complete Works of François Villon, p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> François Villon, Le Testament et Poésies Diverses, préparés par Barbara N. Sargent (New York: Meredith Publishing Company, 1967), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> De Lorris and de Meung, op. cit., p. 97.

Supplies the proper purpose of such love  
This love is common to all men and beasts.<sup>1</sup>

Villon continues this line of thinking in Ballade pour Robert d'Estouteville and states how, at the break of day, Robert burns with desire for his love. She is the lady of his heart and he has grown accustomed to her; that is why they are together. He continues his discourse, but in so doing he restates an idea expressed by de Meung when he refers to her womb as a field in which he had planted his seed:

Si ne pers par la graine que je sune  
En vostre Champ, quant le fruit me ressemble  
Dieu m'ordonne que le fouysse et fume;  
Et c'est la fin pour quoy sommes ensemble.<sup>2</sup>

Thus by these statements, we find that de Meung and Villon have definite ideas--parallel ideas about the purpose of love. It has been described as being deceptive in nature, making fools of men, and although it can exist between a man and woman, both authors agree that it is basically for the perpetuation of the race.

Having discussed the attitudes of de Meung and Villon toward love--a specific subject, one can now move to the general area of feminism. Since the probability is great that their views of the women in their personal lives affected their general view of women, the writer has found it rewarding to treat their attitudes toward love. Perhaps one may even be able to detect parallelisms between their views on love and women.

De Meung's first definition of love, as stated before, shows love

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<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>2</sup>  
The Complete Works of Francois Villon, p. 94.



as highly deceptive and contradictory. If one stretches this idea, perhaps one may connect it to Genius' comment when Genius pictures the life of a man with an avaricious wife:

Fair sirs, beware of women, if you love  
Your bodies and your souls; at least don't be  
So bungling in your conduct as to tell  
Them secrets you should keep locked in your breasts.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to Genius, Nature, while explaining the influence of the heavens, tells how Venus, after having an affair with Mars, tricks her husband into forgetting the fact of her adultery. She concludes that:

...there's no creature can more hardily  
Than women commit perjury and lie....<sup>2</sup>

Villon shares this attitude toward women when he states in the Double Ballade, that whether a woman is blond or brunette, man is mad to trust her. Woman fools man and makes him believe that one thing is another. It is interesting to show that both men think women are not to be trusted; they make fools of men by lying and as Villon says in the Ballade des femmes de Paris:

...aux dames Parisiennes  
De beau parler donnez le pris;  
Quoy qu'on die d'Italiennes,  
Il n'est bon bec que de Paris.<sup>3</sup>

De Meung goes even a step farther in his attack on women when he states that:

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<sup>1</sup> De Lorris and de Meung, op. cit., p. 354.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 385.

<sup>3</sup> The Complete Works of François Villon, p. 102.

All women, are, have been, e'er will be,  
In thought, if not in deed, unvirtuous;<sup>1</sup>

In the words of the Friend as he teaches the Lover the art of love:

No man can be so sure of womankind,  
Or know his lady well enough, to feel,  
How loyal e'er she be and waverless.<sup>2</sup>

Continuing with the view that woman is an unvirtuous being, Villon speaks out against the prostitutes of his day who love for money only. In his Ballade (La Belle Héaulmière aux filles de joie), Villon writes of the girls who, in order to hide their profession from the police, begin to earn part of their livelihood as shopkeepers. In this poem he advises them to stop putting men out to pasture and to start taking them right and left; he wants them to spare no man. These women love for money only and in return are loved only for the moment. He attempts to rationalize their behavior by saying:

Qui les meut a ce ? J'ymagine  
Sans l'onneur des dames blasmer,  
Que c'est nature femenine  
Qui tout vivement veult amer.<sup>3</sup>

Villon spares no shame when he tells of how he was the agent for the prostitute Fat Margot in Ballade de la Grosse Margot. In this poem he tells how she must bring the money to him and if she does not, he beats her.

De Meung speaks of women who are afraid to have children. They are the ones who either love for delight or love for money.

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<sup>1</sup> De Lorris and de Meung, op. cit., p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>3</sup> The Complete Works of François Villon, p. 54.

She who would yield herself for any price  
 Cannot be good. One should have naught to do  
 With any woman who her body sells.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, he adds:

No woman e'er made love a merchandise  
 Except a harlot proved; there's no real love  
 Found in a woman who will sell herself.<sup>2</sup>

De Meung tells of still another type of woman--the woman who is covetous of gain, and gluttonous to swallow and consume everything until nothing remains.<sup>3</sup>

Villon, in a similar manner, takes the opportunity to talk about his mistress represented by the epithet "Rose." Although she has money, she still wants more as is implied when Villon says:

Item, m'amour, a chiere Rose,  
 Ne luy laisse ne cuer ne foge;  
 Elle ameroit mieulx autre chose,  
 Camban qu'elle ait assez monnoye.  
 Quoy? une grant bource de soye,  
 Qui luy laira escu ne targe.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, de Meung and Villon continue time after time in their insults against the weaker sex. One has discussed how the two authors have exposed their unvirtuous way--all women as stated by de Meung are included--secular and lay. They are gossipers not being able to keep secrets; some are prostitutes. Such treatment, such exposure, such

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<sup>1</sup> De Lorris and de Meung, op. cit., p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The Complete Works of François Villon, p. 71.

realism is far from that of Lorris who puts women on a pedestal to be served by her lover. Such esteem and respect seem almost non-existent when one considers that women are blasphemed by the two authors.

Villon, in the Ballade pour prier nostre Dame, makes a direct attack. In the latter portion of the poem he sends a ballad to his love ending in "R"--which was a sort of metaphysical insult--choosing as the messenger to carry it Pennet de la Barre (a police inspector of prostitutes) and directing him:

...s'il rencontre en son erre  
Ma demoiselle au nez tortu,  
Il luy dira sans plus enquerre:  
"Orde paillarde, dont viens tu?"<sup>1</sup>

De Meung jumps on the bandwagon as he expounds his views in the words of the Jealous Husband recounting how women have deceived men. Here, the Jealous Husband accuses his wife of having accepted a gift from her lover. His wife tells him that it is a gift from her mother who has sent it to her out of love for him. The Jealous Husband curses his mother-in-law as he states:

If those are not the very words you used,  
I'll see her burned alive, the dirty whore,  
Old prostitute, vile, bawd, and sorceress  
And you along with her, as you deserve.<sup>2</sup>

There are other examples of the profanity transfixed upon the wife by the Jealous Husband as he tells how she has put him to shame. However, the writer will let the example cited suffice.

Up to this point the writer has shown how the authors have

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<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>2</sup>  
De Lorris and de Meung, op. cit., p. 188.

repeatedly attacked women. Be that as it may, one would not portray the true image of this subject if it were ended here. There are other examples that are relevant to this discussion of feminism. Although de Meung and Villon have given the impression that all women are evil--and from this discussion the two of them seem to be anti-feminists--it is essential to give acknowledgement to their belief that there are some virtuous women. Because so much treatment is given to the less virtuous woman, one is led to the fallacious conclusion that Villon and de Meung believe that there are not any virtuous ones. This is not true. By their preoccupation with the less honored woman, the authors merely try to show that the virtuous woman--secular or lay--is a rarity.

De Meung, when Friend relates how a Jealous Husband abuses his wife, tells of the virtuous Lucretia, who after being ravished by King Tarquin's son, commits suicide. He adds that no Lucretia lives in Rome today--implying that women like her no longer exist. However, he clarifies the obscurity overshadowing the subject when he states that a virtuous woman is rarer than a phoenix; rarer than white crows.<sup>1</sup> He continues:

Lest any living man assert that I  
Seem too severely to assail the sex,  
I'll modify my statement. He who'd find  
A virtuous woman--secular or nun--  
Much labor must expend upon his search.  
Such birds are scattered thinly o'er the earth;<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 176.

This statement should remove any doubt that de Meung was totally an antifeminist--his attack, personal or subjective as it may be, is objective in that he admits, with reservations, that there are exceptions.

It is interesting that Villon, who in a similar view has satirized women, should agree with de Meung. In his Ballade (La Belle Héaulmiere aux filles de joie), Villon makes a startling contrast, when, after having given advice to prostitutes (love while you can), he suddenly praises women of honor.

Mais en femmes d'honneur et nom  
Franc homme, se Dieu me sequeure,  
Se doit emploier; ailleurs, non.<sup>1</sup>

Villon shows tenderness and affection for another woman--his mother-- when he remembers her in Double Ballade. He realizes the suffering and pain that she has carried for him as he speaks of "ma povre mere."<sup>2</sup> He again gives her reverence and respect when in the beautiful Ballade pour prier Notre Dame, he depicts her as a devout woman.

Here ends Villon's and de Meung's treatment of women. If at times they seem to be highly critical of women, one must remember that they are depicting their eras as they saw them. Though extremely subjective in their views, they have both retained enough objectivity to present their works as documents of their times. One can see the strong parallelisms between the two authors even more so in this chapter--despite the more than two hundred years which separate their lives and works!

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<sup>1</sup>

The Complete Works of François Villon, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup>

Ibid., p. 67.

## CHAPTER III

### RENAISSANCE TRENDS

Having exposed de Meung's and Villon's treatment of feminism, one is now able to turn to another item of common interest: the Renaissance trends found in their works. Although the writer makes reference to de Meung as a forerunner and Villon as a transitional figure of the Renaissance, up to this point, no proof has been given to substantiate these statements. Actually, finding Renaissance trends in the works of Villon seems more probable than finding them in the works of de Meung. After all, Villon wrote in the latter part of the fifteenth century and the Renaissance came to France in the early part of the sixteenth century. The difference between the two periods is only about one hundred years, whereas, the difference between the era of de Meung and the Renaissance is about three hundred years. Improbable as it may seem, this chapter shall focus on these tendencies in both authors.

Studying the Renaissance, one can find certain characteristics that distinguish it as a new era. The Renaissance came to France during the reign of Francois I<sup>er</sup> after the Italian wars. During the said wars, Francois I<sup>er</sup> made several trips to Italy where he was astounded by the intellectual and cultural awakening there. Wishing to expose his country to this new treasure, he brought to France many of the Italian artists and their works.

The period is also marked by numerous inventions and discoveries.

The voyages of Columbus, of Vasco da Gama and of Magellan made the people aware of the existence of other worlds different from theirs, and the invention of the printing press made the works of writers available to a larger public. Thus, unlike the people of the medieval period, the people of the sixteenth century had discovered new ideas, new cultures, new civilizations--novelties that gave to France a spiritual uplift--it was a rebirth of intellectual freedom.

Examining the chief characteristics of the literary Renaissance, one can be safe in saying: (1) man was no longer terrified by death; instead he accepted it as a part of life, (2) man was made aware of the shortness of youth, (3) there was a certain amount of respect shown for the individual on earth, (4) the Renaissance showed man attacking his church, his religion, his God; (5) the Renaissance found life to be worth man's living, worthy to be an end in itself. Such ideas were expounded by sixteenth-century greats like François Rabelais, Pierre de Ronsard, and Michel de Montaigne. The characteristics listed above represent some of the more noticeable marks of the Renaissance. Nevertheless, these same marks were engraved long before the Renaissance came into being.

For example, de Meung's and Villon's influences can be seen in the works of Rabelais, one of the most outstanding figures of the Renaissance. Gargantua and Pantagruel is the most famous work by Rabelais and the work from which all of his examples will be cited. In the first chapter of this study the writer introduces de Meung's and Villon's treatment of religion, where the reader is able to note that the authors make several attacks against the religious Orders of



their day. It is established that de Meung and Villon are not attacking the Order, per se, but the men who use the Orders as a guise for their own misbehavior. Therefore, it seems almost like an echo when one hears Rabelais, in the second book of Pantagruel, chapter XXIX, where Pantagruel prays to God before fighting the Dipsodes. Here clearly one sees the acknowledgement and faith in a Superior Being as it is discussed previously with de Meung and Villon. Rabelais continues with an attack against the religious orders:

Donc, s'il te plaît à cette heure m'être en aide, comme en toi seul est ma totale confiance et espoir, je te fais voeu que par toutes contrées tant de ce pays d'Utopie que d'ailleurs où j'aurai puissance et autorité, je ferai prêcher ton saint Evangile purement, simplement et entièrement, si que [si bien que] les abus d'un tas de papelards [faux dévots] et faux prophètes, qui ont par constitutions [règlements] humaines et inventions dépravées envenimé tout le monde, seront d'entour moi exterminés.<sup>1</sup>

This is not the only attack that Rabelais makes on religious orders. In his Gargantua, he denounces the evils of the theologians (Book I, Chapter 20) and the monks who pray "sans y penser ni entendre" (Book I, Chapter 40).

Still another characteristic that shows de Meung and Villon as precursors of the Renaissance is their concept of death. Perhaps if Villon is examined first, this concept will be understood. Villon lived at the end of the medieval period--a time when life was plagued by wars and diseases. People lived in constant fear--fear of living as shown by their asceticism and fear of death--a close companion. It

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<sup>1</sup> François Rabelais, Gargantua, Pantagruel, livre second, extraits in Editions Classiques Larousse (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1936), p. 112.

is an oddity to find a person who differed so strongly from his environment. Villon was such a person. One can understand this in Ballade des Pendus from Poesies Diverses. This poem is also known as Villon's epitaph. Here, one is able to visualize Villon, as he saw himself, hanged. Gone are the grief and misgivings contemplated when referring to death. In their place is acceptance--acceptance of a fate that is inevitable to all men.

Vous nous voiez cy attachez cinq, six:  
Quant de la chair, que trop avons nourrie,  
Elle est pieça devoree et pourrie,  
Et nous, les os, devenons cendre et pouldre.  
De nostre mal personne ne s'en rie;  
Mais priez Dieu que tous nous vueille absouldre!<sup>1</sup>

Nor does he differ in Les Lais, as he announces that life is not certain.

Et puis que departir me fault,  
Et du retour ne suis certain  
(Je ne suis homme sans desfault  
Ne qu'autre d'acier ne d'estain,  
Vivre aux humains et incertain  
Et apres mort n'y a relaiz,  
Je m'en vois en pays loingtrain),  
Si establis ce present laiz.<sup>2</sup>

Not to be outdone, de Meung, too, shows his keen awareness and acceptance of the inevitable. Before allowing the Lover to take the tower, de Meung interrupts his story with numerous digressions, one of which is his telling how Nature strives to oppose the work of Death. Death comes, capturing one person here, another there, but never

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<sup>1</sup> The Complete Works of François Villon, trans. by Anthony Bonner (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1960), p. 162.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

everyone at the same time.

When one he seizes here, another there  
Escapes him; and, when he the father kills,  
A wife or son or daughter still remains,  
Who, when they see the father lying dead,  
Themselves in face of Death betake to flight,  
Though later they must die, howe'er they flee;  
For medicine and vows are nothing worth.<sup>1</sup>

Almost immediately one is able to notice the lack of sentimentality in his words. There is no feeling of sorrow, no pity. One only perceives a sense of fear--a sense that is known to all--fear of the unknown. De Meung, understandably, reveals this fact but, at the same time, he reminds one that:

...all who live attempt to flee from Death--  
From black-faced Death, who follows in pursuit.  
They flee, and Death gives chase--ten, twenty years,  
Thirty, forty, fifty, sixty-five;  
Yes, seventy, eighty, ninety, or fivescore--  
And always crushing those whom he can seize.  
Though it may seem that he has passed some by,  
He ne'er forgets them but to them returns  
Until, in spite of the physicians' skill,  
He has them in his power.<sup>2</sup>

Except for fear, de Meung seems to detach himself from all sentiments surrounding death. One may say that his attitude is somewhat stoical toward death.

Near the end of the sixteenth century, there lived a man who expounds these ideas in his work--the work, Essais; the man--Michel de Montaigne. In his work, Montaigne continues the ideas of de Meung and Villon. He states that death is inevitable; but he also contributes

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<sup>1</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung, The Romance of the Rose, trans. by Harry Robbins (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1962), p. 339.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 340.

to this opinion, in that he adds that it is the fear of death that makes death a constant torment. Therefore, he believes, if death frightens one, he should not think about it.

Le but de notre carrière, c'est la mort, c'est l'objet nécessaire de notre visée: si elle nous effraie, comme est-il possible d'aller un pas en avant, sans fièvre? Le remède du vulgaire, c'est de n'y penser pas.<sup>1</sup>

Montaigne continues, advocating different kinds of divertissements to occupy the mind. He agrees that life is short; so one should make the best of it.

Villon had already given this advice about one hundred years before Montaigne, when he advised his girl friend in Ballade a s'amy thus: "beuvez fort, tant que ru peut courir."<sup>2</sup> In his Chanson from Le Testament, he continues:

Item: veuil qu'autour de ma fosse  
Ce qui s'ensuit, sans autre histoire,  
Soit escript en lettre assez grosse,  
Et qui n'auroit point d'escriptoire  
De charbon ou de pierre noire  
Sans en rien aentamer le plastre;  
Au moins sera de moi memoire,  
Telle qu'elle est d'ung bon follastre.<sup>3</sup>

This joie de vivre is amplified in Rabelais' Gargantua wherein the motto for L'Abbaye de Thélème is "fay ce que voudras."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michel de Montaigne, Essais, livre premier, extraits, in Editions Nouveaux Classiques Larousse (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1965), p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> The Complete Works of Francois Villon, p. 72.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>4</sup> Morris Bishop, A Survey of French Literature (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1965), p. 90.

If one looks farther, still another Renaissance trend is found in the works of de Meung and Villon. One of the dominant characteristics of the Renaissance period is the treatment of the shortness of youth--it should be treasured. Perhaps one of the most famous exponents of this theory is Ronsard. On the other hand, de Meung and Villon exemplify this idea much earlier.

De Meung speaks of an old woman who has lost her youth when the Duenna tells Fair Welcome the story of her life. She attempts to tell him the art of love as she reflects upon her past.

Believe me, if at your age I had known,  
As well as I know now, the game of love,  
It had been well. I had great beauty then,  
But now, when I survey my worn-out face  
And see its wrinkles, I but sigh and groan;  
For I recall my former loveliness....<sup>1</sup>

The Duenna continues by saying that she acted foolishly in her youth, gaining experience, but yet, falling into snares:

Before I ever learned to know myself.  
Grievous misfortune 'twas I learned so late!  
For by that time I was beyond my youth;  
My door, that once oft opened, night and day,  
Now ever to its threshold closely clung.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the most beautiful treatment of the subject is done by Villon in his Ballade des dames du temps jadis with its refrain "Mais ou sont les neiges d'antan?"

Dictes moy, ou n'en quel pays  
Est Flora la belle Romaine  
Archipiades, ne Thais  
Qui fut sa cousine germaine?

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<sup>1</sup> De Lorris and de Meung, op. cit., p. 265.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 266.

Echo, parlant quand bruyt on maine  
 Dessus riviere ou sur estan  
 Qui beaulte ot trop plus qu'humaine.  
 Mais ou sont les neiges d'antan?<sup>1</sup>

Time waits for no man, not even Villon:

Je plains le temps de ma jeunesse  
 (Ouquel j'ay plus qu'autre gallé  
 Jusques a l'entree de viellesse),  
 Qui son partement m'a celé.  
 Il ne s'en est a pie allé  
 N'a cheval: hélas! Comment don?  
 Soudainement s'en est vollé  
 Et ne m'a laissié quelque don.<sup>2</sup>

Although these examples will suffice to show de Meung's and Villon's Renaissance trends in the treatment of lost youth, the writer cannot terminate this section without paying tribute to La Vieille en regret-tant le temps de sa jeunesse (Les Regrets de la Belle Héaulmiere.) In this poem Villon tells of a woman lamenting her old age. She recalls when she was young and beautiful but realizes that

Tost allumees, tost estaintes  
 Et jadis fusmes si mignotes!  
 Ainsi en prent a mains et maintes.<sup>3</sup>

If one reads lines like these from the poetry of de Meung and Villon, he will agree that they must have influenced Ronsard, who restates their ideas in his Ode à Cassandre, "Mignonne, allons voir si la rose:"

Tandis que votre âge fleuronne  
 En sa plus verte nouveauté,  
 Cueillez, cueillez votre jeunesse:

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<sup>1</sup> The Complete Works of Francois Villon, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

Comme a cette fleur la vieillesse  
Fera ternir votre beauté.<sup>1</sup> (Odes 1, 17)

These are but a few of the Renaissance trends that are common to both men. There are many more, like the realism depicted by de Meung and Villon. In their works not only is one exposed to love and death but also to la condition humaine--the sight of men after they have been hanged, problems of marital and physical love, prostitution--the hard core of life stripped of all its fineries. When one reads de Meung, he cannot help thinking of the bawdiness later found in the works of Rabelais; on reading the personal lyrics of Villon, one can foresee the individualism of Montaigne; the allegorical poem of Marot, Le Temple de Cupido, is it not an imitation of Le Roman de la Rose? One cannot deny that the influence of de Meung and Villon affected the writers of the Renaissance--even though their works were written many, many years before.

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<sup>1</sup>  
André Lagarde et Laurent Michard, XVI<sup>e</sup> Siècle (Paris: Les Editions Bordas, 1966), p. 139.

## CONCLUSION

As one reviews the topics discussed in the preceding chapters, he can see many similarities in the writings of Jean de Meung and François Villon. Both authors had aversions to the religious orders of their times. If these men did not hold religious convictions, one would be more willing to question their views. However, because it has been shown that they believed in a Superior Being, such misgivings are not present. This being the case, one can look upon de Meung's and Villon's treatment of religion in their works as a document of their times.

Through their writings one is able to see the cloister as it really was. There were persons therein who were swindlers and hypocrites, and they led lives that were anything but chaste. One may wonder why the depiction of the religious orders is so important; the importance lies in the fact that religion represented the heart of medieval life. The cloister held the vital link between man and his God. It is no wonder, then, that man's relationship to God has been epitomized constantly in medieval literature from Le Serment de Strasbourg and Les Chansons de Geste to Le Mystère de la Passion and the works of François Villon. Thus, it is in works such as de Meung's Le Roman de la Rose and Villon's poems that one is once again attuned to the aspects of medieval religious life. However, unlike Les Chansons de Geste and Les Mystères, de Meung's and Villon's writings present more realistic views.

Although the authors' comments are subjective, the reader is able to feel the impact of their sincerity as he is cautioned that these



attacks are not against religion; nor are they against the monks and nuns per se, but they are against those persons who use religion as a façade for their own misconduct. Moreover, since this treatment is prevalent in both works and to a high degree, one can discern that such misbehavior was not uncommon among the members of the cloister.

Although one can conjecture that religion was ever present in the minds of the medieval public, it is interesting to note that during the thirteenth century a new concept of life is born that will live for more than two hundred years. It is a concept or view toward women--one that definitely changes from that of earlier times. De Meung and Villon give this concept form in their works, as the woman of their day is seen in a different light from the woman of courtly days. In fact, the light has become somewhat shady. De Meung and Villon expose her as being deceitful, cunning in devising means for gain, a prevaricator; stopping at nothing for her desires, she even propositions herself. Removed now from her pedestal, she is cursed in words whose vibrations would stun a deaf man.

Since woman is looked upon in a different perspective, love, too, has a new appearance. The authors show love to be as foolish and as deceptive as woman. One is advised to flee love before it robs him of his youth. One looks upon love as merely a carnal delight for the perpetuation of the races.

It would be a misinterpretation to perceive medieval life as totally one way or the other (bad or good), for, too often, the petals are overlooked by the appearance of the flower. De Meung and Villon attempt to paint a clear image by acknowledging that all the women

living during their era were not cast from the same mold as the women described here. However, the exceptions are rare. Moreover, all the bishops, monks and nuns were not felonious either, nor were they the only ones stigmatized by this trait. It is acknowledgements such as these that make the writer feel that there is enough objectivity found in the authors' works to make them documentary--especially since de Meung's and Villon's writings show trends of living that existed over a two-hundred-year span.

In addition to their views on religion and feminism, the writer found it interesting to include similar Renaissance trends found in their works. Not only were the authors aware of the problems of their day, but also they had enough insight to include in their writings elements which would be the characteristics of a new age. Thus, even though they lived in a period when people were haunted by death in many shapes and sizes (famines, wars, plagues), one is able to see in their works such Renaissance trends as the acceptance of death, the value placed on the brevity of youth and fulfillment of life. It is parallelisms such as these, their documentation of medieval life and their concept of a new age, that make these writers great men of their own times as well as precursors of the modern epoch.

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